

January 15, 2009

RE: Senate Bill 191

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

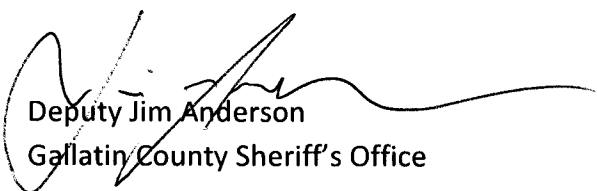
This letter is to request your support for Senate Bill 191 Funding for Court Security. A court security fee is not a new idea; several other states have already implemented a court security fee to address their safety needs. In 2006, the Montana Department of Justice inspected all District Courts in Montana and identified severe deficiencies in Montana's court security. Local Budgets and the State Budget are limited. Money budgeted for court security personnel and court security equipment is minimal or nonexistent and none is forthcoming.

This bill is not asking for money from the state or taxing the general public. This bill assesses a fee only to those who use the justice system and create the potential need for court security. This fee is assessed not only to those persons found guilty of crimes, but also to parties who use the justice system for civil litigation and probate cases.

Court Security measures, of course, are for the safety of all who use the Justice system, but particularly the innocent bystanders. Courtrooms frequently include School Kids observing court for their government classes, College students attending court for their classes, witnesses subpoenaed for trial, jurors required by law to do their civic duty, and victims and their families. These people are exposed to potential threats through no fault of their own. It is our obligation to provide a safe environment for these people, and the Justice system cannot operate properly without a safe environment.

With an increase of violence in court rooms around the United States, I think we can all agree that unless we do not take a proactive approach to court security, it is just a matter of time before we have a tragedy in our Montana Court Rooms. Senate Bill 191 is our opportunity to take action before a tragedy occurs.

Thanks for you consideration,


Deputy Jim Anderson
Gallatin County Sheriff's Office